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Erol Collis Sanders
With love
from
Chaa.

"NOOITGEDACHT"

A true tale of Peace and War

by

MRS. HECKFORD

Author of "A Lady Trader in the Transvaal" etc.

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"Nooitgedacht!" "Unthought of!" "Surprise!" A well named farm indeed! When Piet Potchieter took possession of the wild tract of some three thousand acres, distant about 54 miles from Pretoria, named it, and built on it the long low thatched house of sun-dried mud which still stands, shadowed by old syringa and orange trees. He has as little idea that his beautiful farm was to give its name to a memorable battlefield half a century later, as that he himself was to be cut into small pieces by the Zoutpansberg Kaffirs in revenge for his cruelties to their wives and children, and was to give his name to the pretty village of "Piet-Potchieters-Rust" built on the site of his disaster.

It was to this low thatched house that William Jennings some twenty-eight years ago brought his young wife and children, little dreaming of all the strange changes that time was to unfold. He was a fine, genial fellow, strong of limb, cheery of voice, with a pleasant word for every one - black or white; a golden-brown bushy beard and merry blue eyes. He had a hard struggle to get the farm: he had to make the money to buy it by elephant and ostrich hunting, far away in the interior, where the danger from the wild animals was nothing compared with the fever and from the fickle-minded Kaffir chieftains; but he was one of the sons of James Jennings, the old hunter of Blue Bank farm, and to him the life in the hunting-grounds was fun, and when he and his father and brothers started off from old James Jennings' farm of Blue Bank, they started in high spirits. But when they were gone, and the women, who had for weeks been living in a turmoil of preparation, baking biscuits, roasting and grinding coffee, seeing to all the infinitely numerous details requisite for the fitting out of a hunting-expedition, turned back into the silent house, Mary Jennings' heart was ready to break, as she looked forward to the long months of waiting - of watching for some stray traveller coming from the interior, who some day, un-expectedly, might rein up his rough nag at the cottage door, and say words of comfort or despair to her; and at the end of those months, when the time for the home-coming had arrived, to the listening for the distant boom of the great elephant guns, always fired by returning hunters when none of those who had quitted home, had been left behind - to return no more.

William was the only son married, and his mother, brave, cheery and rough, although she meant kindly to her young daughter-in-law, could hardly have been of much comfort. All her elder children were boys, hearty young fellows who were never at rest, and kept the house in a perpetual uproar - never interfered with or encouraged by their quiet-going, keen-eyed father, but dealt with by their mother like the jolly young cubs they were - so that perhaps when they took themselves off, her regret at parting with them was tempered by the thought of a few months' peace: a self-restrained woman too, one who had learnt to take the world as she found it, through the experience of many a Kaffir raid in the Cape Colony, when on one occasion, she had fled for her life with a child under one arm and a bag of ammunition under the other, to a place of refuge where she, with her husband, and a few others kept a swarm of Kaffirs at bay until relief came.

Not that young Mary Jennings was in any way deficient in that most excellent quality -self-control; or indeed in any of the qualities which most grace womanhood, amongst which I reckon that farm of modesty, which shrinks from publicity - a quality which I must here confess would prevent the publication of this paper, had she any idea that it were being written, although she will doubtless pardon the writer. She was a tall, slender girl; so slender that when her high-mettled horse curvetted, and swayed her in the saddle, a jolly Boer neighbour cried to her husband, "Have a care Willem! That wife of yours will break in half if she rides that horse!"

She was the daughter of a Commissariat officer in the British army who retired and took to farming, and died before he had made a success, leaving his widow and orphan girls to face the world as best they might. She too remembered Kaffir raids, and being carried on a soldier's shoulder to the camp of refuge - other soldiers holding her up to see the burning farms at night, she had a true English contempt of personal danger, but a true womanly dread of danger to others, and most of all to her loved ones. A nature so sensitive that the suffering of any creature caused her pain, and a delicate appreciation of beauty which was hurt by riotous - although merry disorder.

And so William Jennings bought peaceful, beautiful Nooitgedacht, as soon as he possibly could, and brought her there to a home of her own.

It was but little cultivated then, but there were orange and peach and apricot and fig trees, and a solitary date-palm. The soil was very fruitful wherever it was cleared from the wild bush and long grass, the pasturage too was good, there was more than one stream of beautiful, clear water springing from the rocks of the Maguleesberg which bounds the farm on the north, and on its high ground, horses were safer during the unhealthy season than at Blue Bank. There were also several Kraals of Kaffirs on the property who soon found that they had a good master and mistress in William and Mary Jennings and were well disposed towards them. Here, in this beautiful but utterly lonely spot, with no protection save her own brave heart, the young mother had often to be left in charge whilst her husband took his waggons and went trading or riding transport. Sometimes she had gone with him on such expeditions, and had enjoyed seeing the herds of wild deer (so common in those days) and the quaggas, and once a whole family of lions, who leisurely inspected the approaching waggons and then bounded off. By sights like these, and by the sometimes beautiful scenery, she had been repaid for the many hardships of waggon travellers in a country then most wild: besides, had she not the joy of being with her husband and of seeing her little ones gaining health that always with children seems to accompany life on a waggon. Now however, she had to remain at Nooitgedacht and look after the farm whilst her husband was away. Everything prospered to his hand, and soon he could think of building a new and commodious house - a matter of great delight to Mary. To have a nice house - where she could have things in order, and bring up her children nicely, to have a verandah with trailing creepers on it, and flowers round it, to have a little flower garden, - all this was a great ambition of hers, and it seemed likely to be fulfilled. But building a house was a difficult thing in those days. The bricks for it had to be made by journey-men brick-makers, who tramped the country, going from farm to farm seeking work: it was the same, with the builders or carpenters. These men had to live with the farmer whilst doing the work; they were generally drunken and disorderly, much given to profane language, also much disposed to leave their work and disappear for prolonged intervals, sometimes altogether. Then all the wood had to be brought from far off places where the proper sort grew, and had to be fashioned into all the numerous shapes requisite for the building of a house; it was hard to get glass for the windows - everything in short had to be got with difficulty and loss of time. It is strange now to

look back only a few years and think of what the work on a Transvaal farm meant then. Candles had to be made from the fat of the slaughtered animals or from those that died naturally; soap had to be made also; ink was manufactured by boiling the leaves of a certain tree in an old iron pot, or with some rusty nails; there were no luxuries to be had; the honey of wild bees, taken out of the rocks or trees, had often to do duty as sugar; wild animals who raided the fold or the poultry-house were very common, and the wheat when reaped had to be tramped out by cattle on a "tramp-floor" reminding one of Boaz and Ruth. It was hardly wonderful as time went on and more children came, that Mrs. Jennings' health began to fail; her spirit never, until Death visited the happy family.

A little baby, and a splendid little boy, "Willie" the very apple of his father's eye, a child of such promise that all who knew him, will still remember him - were swept off by diphtheria, and it was not long after the family were settled in the hardly finished house, when the same fatal disease claimed the youngest girl "Edie" a little thing of only five years old - one of those children who strike one who knows children as being sure to die - as being too unearthly in their nature to remain long on earth.

So when the English flag flew over Pretoria, and Sir Garnet Wolseley was bidding farewell to the Transvaal - William and Mary Jennings had but two children, Augusta and Sarah left to them. They were both charming girls, although very unlike. Augusta, a tall, elegant and quiet girl of eleven, with flowing light brown locks and large dreamy, grey eyes, a girl who looked much older than she was. Sarah, a little ten-year old, a chubby, wilful imp, who looked younger than she was - who was always in a touzle, and quite distractingly naughty and nice. What with William Jennings' hearty enjoyment of life, which caused him to make mirth wherever he went; with Augusta's dainty management of wild pets, which made the house the home of soft-eyed, shy spring-bucks, of confident birds, and other delightfully quaint creatures who came and went at their pleasure; and Sarah's never failing antics - Nooitgedacht was a very cheerful abode, although the spirits of its mistress were subdued and her health failing. One thing greatly troubled her; the anxiety that her girls should have the advantage of a better education than had fallen to the share of either their father or herself, and this desire of hers was a difficult one to gratify - for people of education were rare in the Transvaal, and such as came, were bent on making money and not on teaching children. In fact the girls never had more than a scant two years' teaching in their lives, yet through natural ability, they can now hold their own with many who have had greater advantages. As for William Jennings, he took these matters easily. He would throw his little girls on to a horse and tell them to "come along" when he cantered off, and he called that teaching them to ride - and it did teach them, if fearlessness in dealing with horses has anything to do with riding: for the rest he did not much trouble himself, but he liked to see his children enjoy themselves, and would take them whenever he could, to see the races, or a review at Pretoria, or to have a dance with some cousins at Blue Bank, or have some young friends for a little dance and a merry-making at Nooitgedacht, when he would play on his violin, and the girls would play the piano.

Times changed quickly during the English occupation. Ordinary comforts became more common; women and girls began to try to be more elegant in their dresses; little by little the wild life began to slip away from the district round Pretoria, although it remained untouched in most other parts of the country; when, suddenly, after many unheeded threatenings, the war of 1880, broke out.

William Jennings was told by his Boer neighbours that he must choose his side distinctly. They knew that he and his wife were quite British at heart, indeed Mrs. Jennings had always kept herself and her daughters aloof from their Boer neighbours - although treating them civilly. So the whole family moved into Pretoria, where old James

Jennings and his wife had a house. Then followed the siege of 1880, during which time William Jennings served in the Reserve and did duty as a guard. His horses and oxen were requisitioned, and it was hard for the whole family to see their pet animals used, and at times abused by their foes. Of all the animals, only one came back to them: a fine black stallion, who strange to say, carried three captains of the volunteers who were shot on him - one of them, mortally, without being injured himself. They all bore themselves bravely throughout, for England's sake, but the Retorsecession broke them. Never shall I forget the morning when that terrible news was published in the Camp of Pretoria. Some men raved, but William Jennings and his wife seemed stunned; it was little Sarah alone who was openly indignant. They had not an ox to take their waggons out of camp, not one to take them to their desolated home - to the home they had left in proud confidence that England would protect her own; to which they returned discarded by her, with hired oxen, with but one horse, to find the Boers had reaped their crops, driven off their cattle, slaughtered their sheep, to be insulted in the misery which was almost starvation - for what money they had, was required for buying fresh stock and for hasty repairing. The promised compensation was delayed, and William Jennings had to ride hither and thither to comply with the regulations concerning it. Life on the once happy farm became a torture. Day after day, he would see the cows he had reared himself, and that little Sarah had petted, come wandering back to their old home - he would watch them as they browsed near the house until some Boer would ride up and, whip in hand, drive them off again, or a Kaffir came, saying the Baas had sent for his cows. It was hard to bear, and many a time Mrs. Jennings had to lay her head on his, in silent entreaty that he would curb his useless wrath; for though all this was contrary to the convention, there was no redress to be had.

At last the strain got beyond bearing. One evening he came home from an expedition by which he had vainly hoped to make some money, but had only succeeded in spending some in travelling expenses. Weary, and jaded, he went to bed soon - never to leave it again. Before the brain-fever which carried him off, rose to any height, he told his wife that he knew he was going to die - told her all his business matters quite distinctly, adding that were it not for her sake and the children's he should be glad to die. After that solemn conversation he was again his old cheerful self, until his mind began to wander.

Mrs. Jennings sent for an old friend, a doctor, who stayed with her to the end, and told her, what she would indeed have guessed from the words spoken by her husband in delirium, that his heart was broken and his brain racked by the Retrocession and its consequences, and that medicine would avail but little.

So barely a year after the Transvaal and its loyal inhabitants had been given back to Boer misrule, Mary Jennings found herself left, as her mother had been, to face the world with her orphan girls, their only provision - a ruined farm, a very little money and hardly any means of making a living; for, with the departure of the English, prosperity had also departed from the Transvaal.

She had no one to help her. Relations indeed, she had, but they were all busy looking after their own impaired interests, and rather looked to her for help than thought of affording it. Yet she struggled on: however her own heart was torn, she strove to keep her girls above the evil influences that surrounded them - tried to make their home cheerful, to educate, to improve them, to teach them to think and act as English ladies ought, even if disowned by England and living in a country where honesty, truth, and even decency were openly set at naught. She still kept the neighbouring Boers at a distance, by her calm, cold courtesy, and forced them to respect her; and she won the wayward affection of her Kaffirs by her gentleness.

I lost sight of her and hers for a time, being in England for some years; when I returned in 1887, the budding prosperity of the Gold-fields was making itself felt at Nooitgedacht. Flocks and herds again bleated and lowed in its pastures, and horses fed in the new stable; the creeper-laden verandah and pretty flower garden, longed for of old by Mary Jennings, were there; little Sarah was married to a thriving farmer and was now Mrs. George Hinds, with a pretty little baby boy, to make glad the heart of his grand-mother, for the family lived with her at Nooitgedacht; and Augusta was still graceful, still unmarried, and the acknowledged belle of the country-side; but the battle of life had told on Mrs. Jennings, and bravely though she bore herself, one who knew her well, could see that ; but an iety that all should go well with her girls, she would gladly lay her body beside that of her husband under the old thorn tree in the pretty newly-made grave-yard of Nooitgedacht.

But if not so cheerful as when first I knew it, Nooitgedacht was still peaceful as of yore. The vultures built in the crags of the overhanging precipices and wheeled lazily in the air, the tree-ferns and maiden-hair still made the ravines beautiful and the increase of fields of crops, of vegetable garden and orchard testified to George Hinds' industry as year succeeded year. Sometimes indeed the place was merry enough, as on the Christmas day of 1895, when I, after a long stay up country, revisited Nooitgedacht, my advent being celebrated by a general picnic joined in by cousins living in the neighbourhood. A young tree, growing in the midst of a grassy clearing in the defile close to the house was decorated as a Christmas tree, and there were fireworks and Chinese lanthorns in the evening; the scene presented by the illuminated waggons and carts drawn up in a sort of camp, by the groups of children and girls, some with masks on, and by the moonlit rocks and trees of the ravine being quite dramatic.

Sarah Hind's two elder children, Willie and Gladys, will, I believe, always remember that Christmas day as a thing of glory unsurpassable and it is well; for with that day passed away from Nooitgedacht the soft glory of peace, to be succeeded, just six years later, by the rugged glory of war, which as long as history is read, will make that ravine and those rocks memorable as the spot where our gallant troops held back the overwhelming force of the Boers until our guns could be saved.

It was well for us all that we had no forebodings that festive evening of the troubles which lay before us.

The Jameson Raid burst on us by the New Year, 1896. To resist it, George Hinds and his brother Harry, who had recently married Augusta, were called out at a moment's notice: they were determined not to fire against an Englishman but go they must. The anxiety was dreadful. The rattle of the maxim guns could be distinctly heard at Nooitgedacht and in the valley below, where the newly married couple were then living: then came the stolen visits by night, of the two husbands, bringing news of dismay - for however little they might approve of the methods of the raid, yet the sympathies of all the family were with the English, as in point of fact was well known to their Boer neighbours. To this ill-starred raid succeeded calm, which we all knew was only a preparation for war. On the Boer side, the whole question came to be how long would this treacherous calm last. As time went on the strain on those dwellers in the Transvaal who were loyal to England became intense. They were exposed to constant petty insult, irritated by constant petty oppression and injustice, unable to form any definite business plans by the constantly shifting taxes and duties imposed on all commercial interest, and ever on the watch for an outburst of hostility. The great question amongst them was - would England, when the time came, be true to herself. I happened to be at Nooitgedacht, when the crisis arrived in 1899.

It was no longer the old Nooitgedacht house. When her elder daughter married, Mrs. Jennings built a pretty cottage for her and her husband on a beautiful spur of the Magaliesburg some little distance from the old house and then allowed George Hinds to carry out a pet plan of his, and convert the old homely house into a beautifully appointed Bungalow with a broad verandah running all round it. It was in one of the rooms in the bungalow that I was sitting with Willie and Gladys one September day in 1899, when a man on a streaming horse galloped up to the gate of the enclosure - threw himself off and dashed into the house. We knew well what it was - the war at last! the commandeering order : every man,

horse, bullock and Kaffir was to be at the Veld Cornet's by five o'clock. The children showed courage and controlled themselves - only Mary, the youngest, like all little children wanted to be told what was happening and cried because no one had time to attend to her. I hastened to Harry Hinds' house, knowing that when he left, Augusta would be alone with her baby. It was a heartrending scene. The men intended to take their chance in the ranks without firing, if the worst came, and they thought the worst would come very soon.

"It will be soon over," said George Hinds, trying to be brave. "In a fortnight I shall either be back and a free British subject, or I shall have been killed."

"Good-bye", said Harry Hinds, wringing my hand, "I know I shall never see you again, but I just want you to remember my last words to you. They can force me to go to the front because I am afraid of what might happen to my wife and child if I refuse, but I will never fire a shot against an Englishman - never. If I don't come back, remember that. I don't want it said that I was a renegade Englishman."

Days went by and we heard nothing except vague rumours; I returned to Nooitgedacht and Mrs. Jennings went to stay with Augusta. One evening as we were having a very sad supper there was a step outside, the door opened, and in came George Hinds, travel stained and weary looking, but safe and sound.

He had obtained leave to return home and not to be commandeered to fight, on condition of his tilling and sowing the lands of a number of Boers in the valley of Hekpoort and generally looking after the interests of their families. It was a great relief, and presently Harry Hinds also was allowed to return on somewhat the same conditions.

George Hinds, had, I think, thirty-six women with families to look after, and they kept him hard at work. From dawn till dark he was away: he lent them oxen, lent them seed, lent them milch cows, gave them sheep, tilled their lands, looked after their Kaffirs, lent them his own Kaffirs, read their husbands' letters to them and was even requested to flog their children! Besides during the fruit season, carts used to be sent regularly up to Nooitgedacht to be loaded with fruit for the wives of the Burghers in the field, so that, as a matter of fact, they were much better off than ever they had been before.

The most trying part was the rejoicing over real or imaginary British reverses, which he had to listen to unmoved, for fear of a complaint being lodged against him to the Veld-Cornet, as being friendly to the English. It was a terrible time, and as week succeeded week, and no news reached us except through the Boers, or through the medium of the untruthful "Diggers News" it was difficult to keep up one's courage. I sedulously taught Willie and Gladys and worked them pretty hard: the exercise was certainly beneficial to me and it is to be hoped also to them: certainly it developed in the seven year old Gladys a keen interest in the war, and she knew how its fortunes were going and how our troops were advancing as well or better than her father. I remember once when he hesitated as to the locality on the map of some spot occupied by us during our advance into what was then the "Free State" his little daughter leaned quickly over the big out-spread sheet and pointed it out to him. A certain uncle of hers, Fred Hinds by name, who had managed to slip out of the fighting lines into the Ambulance Caps, was of much consolation to us as the weary months passed by. He had arranged a secret code of words for our benefit to be used in his letters. If he had a headache, we had been to some extent victorious, if he had a bad headache, then the boers had suffered severely: his having a toothache was to be interpreted in the contrary sense. The number of casualties given by him was in the case of the Boers to be multiplied by four, in the case of the British, to be divided by two. I remember his letter when the fight which at last relieved Ladysmith was in progress. He was with the ambulance at Pieters heights. "I have a headache," it began, and it ended "my head is so bad that I cannot write more."

It was a very general opinion amongst the Boers in the vicinity of Nooitgedacht that the war would end if Ladysmith were relieved. They regarded the relief as almost impossible, but there was a feeling that if this impossibility proved possible there would be no use fighting any more. Indeed there seemed but little desire to fight amongst them. Even whilst they still held the lines at Colenso, all sorts of frivolous pretexts for remaining or returning home used to be put forward by men who talked as if they were anxious for the fray; after the relief of Ladysmith and the surrendered of Cronje the difficulty of getting them to remain on Commando or to return to the front if they once left became greater, and at last threats of severe punishment had to be freely used by Commandants and Veld Cornets. With the close of the sowing season the anxiety at Nooitgedacht became intense, for the work that George and Harry Hinds had principally been spared for was done, and fresh levies for the front were needed. Then the men determined to take some small provision with them and to remain hidden amongst the rocks and trees that cluster round the base of the bold precipices which at that point crown the Magaleesberg and overhang Nooitgedacht. It was a narrow escape. They were still within sight of the house when a Boer rode up past the hut of a Kaffir close by, who had been watching their departure. This faithful servant, with admirable presence of mind stepped up to the Boer and engaged him in conversation until he thought his master was in safety so that when the horseman reached the house and showed his commandeer-ing order, Sarah Hinds could affirm that both her husband and her brother-in-law were away, "looking for cattle," which means an indefinitely prolonged absence. Then, at last, one bright morning at the end of May, Sarah Hinds came quickly into the room where I was with the elder children. "I can't help it," she said, "I must interrupt you; we can hear the guns!" There was a rush on to the Ver-andah, a breathless hush - and then from far off towards the west came that low ominous sound which no one who has once listened to it in war is likely to forget: it came oftener and oftener, and from the south as well as from the south-west, it got louder and louder all day, and towards evening the hills reverberated with it: the Kaffirs could no longer contain themselves: they danced about and tried to speak English: we knew that our troops were engaged hotly all along the Johannesburg and Krügersdorp line of defence and were not more than some twenty-five miles away.

The firing died away at dusk, and though we listened breathlessly in the dawn of the following day no gun was to be heard, and we knew that Johannesburg was won.

Then fugitive Boers, singly or in small numbers came flying past, stopping to ask their way or to get a little refreshment for themselves or for their horses, and as anxious to avoid their own Commandos as to escape the British troops. A panic seized the Boers of Hek-poort: wild stories of what the British would do were spread amongst them, and one poor mother actually sent his little boy to Sarah Hinds by a Kaffir with a note, begging her to protect him, for that the troops were coming along the valley and murdering all the boys but taking the women and girls prisoners!

On the first of June, Harry Hinds and I started to try to get through to Krügersdorp, ten miles away to learn how things were going but had to turn back, as a flying Commando lay camped right across our road, but on the 11th I started for Pretoria alone. Cornelius Krüger the Veld Cornet was busy trying to get reinforcements for Botha either by persuasion or threats, and it was evident that it was highly desirable to disarm the neighbourhood.

Colonel Airey of the New South Wales Bushrangers was sent with some three hundred men, and on my return I found that arms were being given with alacrity and the loyal Africander families living in the vicinity of Hekpoort were "en fête", the children paying visits to the troopers and giving them flowers. Little Gladys was in high glee, having come down from Nooitgedacht and discovered that henceforward she was going to be an Australian! I shall always have a pathetically

Pleasant recollection of an evening spent in Mrs. Alfred Hinds' house at Hekpoort, when some of these gallant fellows sang and played most charmingly, and with the utmost unconcern, although reports of a neighbouring Commando of unknown strength were brought to the Colonel as he sat amongst us, and calmly gave the requisite orders. Nothing came of it, although, or probably because, good precautions were taken and the next day the troops moved off.

A fortnight later as I was sitting in Augusta Hinds' dining-room late one afternoon, my Kaffir servant Pete, a youngster of about fourteen rushed in to say that the Boers were coming, and four armed men rode up to the garden fence leading George Hinds' horses, and presented a commandeering list to Harry Hinds, ordering him to join the commando that was then assembling under penalty of confiscation or worse. He refused flatly and they demanded his horses. "I cannot prevent your taking them," he said, "you are armed and I have no arms, but I will not break the oath I have taken. I am no longer a Burgher."

"The worse for you," said one of the party who each and all had taken the oath of neutrality and given up arms. "Mind that you keep on your farm, and reckon that everything you have is confiscated." And with that he marched to the stable, Harry Hinds following him. There had been three horses in the stable, one of mine which I had lately bought; and two of Harry Hinds'. One of these was valuable and Pete had cleverly managed to get him out of the stable whilst the parley was proceeding and was holding him hidden behind the wall. After some consultation the Boers decided not to take my horse, probably because of my being a British subject, and went away leading the one belonging to Harry Hinds. We watched them depart, in terror lest the hidden horse should neigh, but they disappeared at last without suspecting how near they had been to him, and, strange to say, that horse, thanks to little Pete's fidelity, was hidden for full three months first in one place and then in another, and kept in good condition, whilst the Boers were occupying the Magaliesberg close by, and were at times wondering where the horse, whom they knew by sight, could have got to!

After dark on that same evening, George Hinds came over to his brother's house. The same scene pretty nearly had taken place with him as the one I had witnessed. It was clear that it would be dangerous for the men who had been so warned to disregard the threats used to them: it might mean their houses being burnt, so the next morning early, I once more started for Pretoria to give notice that the whole valley of the Magaliesberg was in open insurrection, that arms had been disinterred and that the small bodies of men holding Commando and Mosilikats' Nek, were in great danger. On my way I was able to learn that the Commando being assembled was likely to be a large one and was destined to reinforce General Lemmer.

I reached Pretoria that night having warned our troops stationed at Commando Nek as I passed; no return was possible. The reinforcements sent to Mosilikats' Nek were too weak to enable the pass to be held in spite of the heroic defence of it by the Scots Greys and Lincolns.

And though afterwards we drove the Boers back for twenty-six miles west of Pretoria and permanently held Commando Nek further west, along the valley to where the bold bluff of Nooitgedacht stands out conspicuously from the range of precipice. The Boers had it their own way until the arrival of General Clements' force at Hekpoort drove them to the mountain which they held, keeping the families at Nooitgedacht prisoners on their farms. George and Harry Hinds, warned by a friendly Kaffir that the Boers intended to take them prisoners the next day, had escaped and made their way to the British after some adventures, so that when a body of Boers rode up to the houses where the women were waiting anxiously - deployed round them, and sent one of their number to demand the surrender of the master of the house.

For a second time the answer was that they were gone, but this time there was no excuse made. "Do you think," said Sarah Hinds boldly, "that I would wish to see my husband driven on in front of you, a prisoner, like my poor uncle Jerry Jennings was yesterday? I would rather shoot him myself." It was a risky speech, for she and all she had was at their mercy, and she knew it; but she was true to her old assertion. "If you stand up to a Boer, he will never touch you, he is too great a coward - he'll be afraid of you." Whether for that reason or not the Boers certainly behaved well to the Nooitgedacht families: they took their stock, their forage and grain as they were needed, they made the Kaffirs work for them and they tried to break the women's courage by telling them lies as to what was going on, but they treated them with respect. Once an order was given about the cattle which Sarah Hinds told her "Boys" to disregard. The man in command at the time came racing up on horse-back towards where the "Boys" were sitting obedient to their mistress, and cocked his rifle as he approached. She sprang in front of him and dared him to interfere. "These cattle are mine," she said, "and as long as I live and am here, you shall not take them from my care," and the cattle were left.

But there came a day not long after when the Boers fled and the mountain was stormed by the British. Sarah Hinds pleaded with the Colonel to be left to look after the cows and young calves: she had reared them, had seen them grow up in their generation and go out to pasture or stand in the Kraal of an evening in families, the soft-eyed four-footed grandmothers surrounded by their descendants, as these Transvaal-bred cattle will: she knew them all by name: it was hard to deliver them over to the troops to be slaughtered or over-driven; but it was a hopeless request as the officer told her to prepare for the battle. The order was given that the families must move to a place of safety. They had just time to pack up their valuables and taking their old dog, with aching hearts, they got into their waggons. Surrounded by our troops, they bade good-bye to the homes they had struggled so hard to make, leaving their hard won crops to be burned lest the Boers should get them, their fences prostrate, their fruit-trees and flowers broken, their houses empty, standing in the midst of desolation.

"It seems a dreadful pity" said the officer in command to Sarah Hinds, "and I cannot even promise that your beautiful house will not be destroyed, but you may depend on this, you will get full compensation."

But there are things that no money can compensate for. To this brave woman, the only compensation will be for England to do her duty to the Transvaal in future. All the children but Gladys were crying, and the officers turned to her saying, "You are not frightened, are you?" "No," said the child, "Why should I be?"

A brave little British speech, worthy of the little lass who once, whilst still a prisoner of the Boers, with shots flying close to the house, had managed to slip in a letter to me when her mother was secretly sending a message to the British Camp, in which she remarked that I, being safe in Pretoria was quite "out of the fun."

So, after moving about for some days with the troops, this whole family came as they had come in 1880 to Pretoria, the victims of war, but still true to their English blood. George Hinds was there to meet them; Harry Hinds met them at Nooitgedacht being with General Clements' forces at the time.

When the great strain was over and her children were once more under the protection of their husbands, Mrs. Jennings at last succumbed and became dangerously ill. Cooped up in a small town house so unlike the free country she has always been accustomed to, it was doubtful for some days if she would recover, but when Christmas

came round, she with her daughter and other relations, were busy making decorations for one of the hospitals where some of the brave fellows wounded at the battle of Nooitgedacht lay, although too weak to accompany them when they went to see the sufferers.

I cannot end this little sketch of Peace and War better than by repeating the words of some of those who were present at the battle of Nooitgedacht, which began at dawn on the 13th December. But for the astonishing gallantry of our greatly out-numbered troops, it would have ended in a terrible disaster.

"Never" said a Boer who was present, "never shall I forget the bravery of General Clements: it was more than human: I did not think any man could be so brave.

And yet there were hundreds who that day emulated him, whose names will never be known to history.

"It shows what English pluck is," said a man lying in hospital to me, "there was one of the 'Helios' he was on the edge of a precipice and he heliographed, "Boers within thirty paces, ammunition spent, send relief," and then rolled over the precipice rather than be taken prisoner. I looked at the man in horror; I knew the fall was a sheer hundred feet at least. "He only broke three ribs," he went on, "he's getting all right." The speaker was attached to the ambulance and remained behind with the wounded at Nooitgedacht: he spoke up for the Boers, when I remarked that our forces had been greatly out-numbered. "That's all fair," said he, "we've generally outnumbered them, and they fought grandly: it's a pity to kill such men, but it's a pleasure to fight them; it was a beautiful battle: we knew we were out-numbered and we fought well too, I can tell you: it was beautiful, the most beautiful battle perhaps in the whole campaign." It was like listening to a page from Froissart. "They treated the wounded well too," he said after a pause, "gave them everything they wanted, and looked after them as if they were friends: and there was no ill-feeling between us: when we were leaving I shook hands with them. De la Rey's brother was there and shook hands and thanked them. One old fellow brought us some pumpkins and other vegetables, and said we hadn't burnt his house so he must give us something." Then he went on to tell of the result of the fight. "One of the shells that Sergeant in the next bed sent in amongst them, killed twenty-seven of them straight off: they were all Frenchmen - you must tell Mr. Hinds he can't think of living on the place for quite a twelve-month, it's covered all over with carcasses, thickly, and it will be a long time before the water comes down from the mountain will be fit to drink: the gorge was full of dead Boers and they buried them almost in the water." And then he spoke of our own dead and of how he had buried some in the garden of Nooitgedacht - others in a common grave not far from the house, "You will ask Mr. Hinds to look after their graves?" said the brave fellow looking at me wistfully.

Of that he, and all those dear ones who fell in that glorious defence, may rest assured: - Nooitgedacht will be worth of England's trust.